

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** January 10, 2013 **Agenda Item:** Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group Recommendations **Bureau:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Approval of Final Rule **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 30 minutes

### **Background**

Brucellosis, the result of bacterial infection, exists in wild bison and elk and occasionally domestic livestock within the Greater Yellowstone Area. Recent GYA livestock cases were linked to transmission from wildlife, with elk the likely source. While significant impacts to elk haven't been clearly identified in Montana, brucellosis can impact the livestock industry. Changes in USDA-APHIS rules reduced the likelihood of a state losing brucellosis-free status due to isolated livestock cases, but put a focus on areas where brucellosis is known to exist in wildlife. As a result, the Montana Board of Livestock established a designated surveillance area in Montana in 2010, where livestock growers are required to increase cattle testing and vaccination efforts. Montana surveillance efforts, using blood tests to determine exposure rates (seroprevalence) to the bacteria among elk began in the late 1980s. Seroprevalence estimates for GYA elk from the late 1980s and early 1990s were below 2 percent. Surveillance conducted over the past 10-15 years reveals what appears to be increasing seroprevalence in some elk populations.

In 2011, the FWP Commission endorsed a citizen working group concept to explore elk management guidelines in areas with brucellosis. After an informational meeting that included research and management presentations from Montana, Idaho, Wyoming and Yellowstone National Park, the group crafted an issue statement, fundamental objectives and alternative actions over six meetings between January and June 2012. The alternative predicted to best address fundamental objectives generally identifies efforts to adjust elk distribution. Potential actions include hunting season and habitat adjustments. The recommendations are presented in a general format and the working group suggests that new, or existing, local groups represent a critical element in helping FWP identify and implement specific management actions, which may require additional commission approval. At this time, the commission may endorse the working group's issue statement and fundamental objectives in addition to the recommended alternative. Except for clarifications made in response to public comments, the recommendations have remained largely unchanged from their initial adoption on Nov. 8.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Public comment ended Dec. 20. This material was presented to four watershed/public meetings. Public comments were made available to the working group and the commission and included opposition that in some cases may be addressed with additional clarification of the recommendations.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

Alternatives include adoption as proposed or with adjustment, additions or deletions. The commission could identify other management considerations or could choose not to adopt these recommendations.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

Adopt the proposed issue statement, fundamental objectives and action alternative.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the commission adopt the proposed issue statement, fundamental objectives and action alternative from the Elk Management Guidelines in Areas with Brucellosis Working Group.

